



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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Georgia Parham 202-208-5634

BLUE-RIBBON TEAM NAMED TO STUDY ECONOMIC IMPACT OF SPOTTED OWL CRITICAL HABITAT PROPOSAL

John Turner, director of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, today announced creation of a blue-ribbon team of economic analysts to examine the impacts of any critical habitat designation for the northern spotted owl. The team is made up of Federal economists and biologists specializing in forestry and natural resource topics.

"Because of the magnitude of the proposal and its potential for social and economic impacts in the Pacific Northwest and beyond, it is essential to gather the best available information regarding this issue. This is an extraordinary measure, but one needed to address an extraordinary situation," said Turner.

The Service recently issued a proposed rule identifying 11.6 million acres in the Pacific Northwest as critical habitat for the northern spotted owl. Public comments on all aspects of the proposal are being solicited by the Service. The economic analysis is part of the Service's effort to refine the proposal. A separate but coordinated review of the various biological values associated with lands included in the initial critical habitat proposal is also under way.

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In the process of designating critical habitat, the Endangered Species Act requires the Service to consider the best scientific information available, as well as the economic and other impacts resulting from such an action. Areas may be excluded from designation if the benefits of exclusion outweigh the benefits of designation.

"The Service is committed to carrying out the mandate of the Endangered Species Act to clearly identify all costs and benefits of critical habitat and to ensure that they are weighed fully and fairly," Turner said.

In making the announcement, Turner directed the group to examine the relationship between benefits and costs related to the question of critical habitat and the degree of balance between the two as required by the Act.

Representatives from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Mines, Council of Economic Advisors, Bureau of Land Management, and Office of Management and Budget will make up the team.